

Design Factors

The Mansfield Downtown Partnership Planning and Design Committee have been meeting on a monthly basis since April. For the last few months, the Committee has focused its efforts on developing a Committee consensus on design factors for new development in Storrs Center. The Committee spent time taking pictures of communities in the United States and in Great Britain with an eye toward appealing and not-so-appealing design, reviewed printed material on design elements, and had several good discussions on design factors for Storrs Center.

The Design Factors were presented to the Partnership Board of Directors on December 3 for their review. The Design Factors have not been approved by any body, nor are they directives, but are a point of discussion in continued work with the consultant team that will work with the community on the design of Storrs Center.

Planning and Design Committee

Consensus on Design Factors

BUILDINGS

Variety with unifying themes

This is the most important, overarching guideline. The new development should not be built all of one style, color, height or material. And yet all the buildings should look like they are related to each other just as the buildings in an historic district do. Simplicity of design with some decoration and even the occasional quirky detail should be the standard.

- Color - plenty of variety is fine, but some standards are desirable to avoid violent discord.
- Height - The height of buildings should be 2-4 stories, with some exceptions (e.g., one-story garage, tall clock tower).
- Materials - The buildings should seem to grow out of a New England tradition, such as sturdy brick, stone, or wooden clapboard.
- Style - Given the density desired of this project, the intimate, urban feel of a New England mill or market town or small city center is a better guide than the lower density Colonial-era agricultural town.
- Roof design - sloping, various orientations and pitches are desirable.

- Energy-efficient, sustainable design principals should apply - "green" technology where feasible.
 - Mixed uses are desirable throughout the project.
 - Windows add variety and interest to the appearance of the street-facing facades of the buildings, as well as providing natural light (and heat on south faces) for the occupants. A variety of styles are desirable. Provision should be made in many cases for window boxes for colorful plantings at both the street and upper levels of buildings.
 - Elements such as awnings and balconies are desired.
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STREETS

Human scale, friendly and safe

The Planning and Design Committee's agreed goal is to build streets, which are intimate, human and pedestrian in scale, which are and feel friendly and safe. The scale component can be accomplished by following the following guidelines:

- Width - maximum two travel lanes plus parallel parking and sidewalks on both sides; but a variety of widths are desirable, ranging down to single lane (no parking), one-way streets with the sidewalk on one side only.
 - Attention to interesting and attractive sidewalks, including various surface textures and materials. On principal streets, sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate pedestrians, sculpture, plantings, displays, benches and outdoor seating for cafes. Again, widths should vary depending on the street function.
 - Amenities such as benches, planters, waste bins, recycling containers, lighting fixtures are desirable.
 - Signage should conform to a set of guidelines, but should not be required to be uniform. Right angle signs that protrude from the building are desirable. Neighboring property owners should be encouraged to bring their signage into compliance with the project's guidelines.
 - Public art - sculpture, banners, decorative elements, murals are encouraged.
 - Banners should be used to announce to drivers along Storrs Road that they are passing through a special district. Banners can also be used to announce special events. Street light poles or other elements should accommodate these banners. Specialized, possibly multi-use kiosks for bill posting are desirable.
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OVERALL - SPECIAL FEATURES

- Small green spaces - "vest pocket" parks are desirable.
 - A playground should be sited near the town center to attract parents with young children.
 - Bodies of water for ambiance in summer and skating in winter are desirable, if feasible.
 - Larger public area for gatherings, performances, events.
 - Focal points, such as public clocks or other elements should be part of the design.
 - Lighting should not be too bright and should face down (should not contribute to light pollution). More low-power streetlamps are preferable to fewer high-power light sources.
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NEGATIVES

The following items were found undesirable by consensus of the committee:

- Big blank walls
- Oversize, "monumental" buildings
- Repetitious, "rubber stamp" architecture
- Large paved parking areas
- Giant open spaces of any kind